

LA VOZ DE UVALDE COUNTY



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The Case of the Disappearing "Brown" Girls

Over the past four weeks or so, *La Voz* received numerous comments concerning the Uvalde High School Varsity and Junior Varsity volleyball teams and the fact that there are no Hispanic girls on either team. This is very disturbing in light of the fact that last year there were approximately 15 Hispanic girls on these teams. Over the past two weeks, *La Voz* interviewed parents of some of the former Hispanic volleyball players and obtained quite a number of comments and viewpoints from the parents.

There is a large amount of discontent among the parents, but more importantly, a group of very discouraged high school girls.

Apparently, the concerns with the volleyball coach, Coach Linda Lindsey, began at the time she assumed the coaching duties for the varsity team. According to parents, a series of activities on the part of the coach caused the girls to rethink their desire to continue participating in



volleyball. It became apparent to the girls, as well as the parents, and even some non-Hispanic parents and volleyball fans that the Hispanic girls were receiving very little, and at times, no playing time on the court even though, from their perspective, some of the Hispanic girls were better players.

Additionally, according to the parents, Coach Lindsey would yell and berate the girls to the point they felt belittled. In one such incident, Coach Lindsey embarrassed a girl to the point of making her cry when she told her in front of the entire team that she was too fat and needed to lose weight. Parents also allege that the coach mentioned this to other girls on an individual basis.

Another aspect noted by the parents was that during the practice routines the Hispanic girls were not given the same type of extensive practice as white girls.

Along with the above-mentioned items, another issue that greatly concerned the parents dealt

(Please See Page 4)

District Yearly Progress Data: Adequate or Inadequate

Tied to the new TAKS test is the Texas Education Agency (TEA) Adequate Yearly Progress District Data. The statistics that comprises the data is obtained from information reported by school districts to TEA. The information is compared year to year to ascertain if school districts are meeting the required educational performance. The table (on page 8) is reconstructed from the TEA Adequate Yearly Progress District Data for the Uvalde CISD.

The first two series of figures are for the 2002-2003 and 2001-2002 reading and language arts tests. The figures show that in the 2001-2002 school year 2,222 students were tested and 1,487 met the passing standard. For the 2002-2003 school year 2,227 were tested and 1,733 met the passing standard. For 2001-2002 the total number of students that passed the test represented 66.90% and for 2002-2003 the percent passing was 77.81%.

The first series of figures also show the student population broken down by ethnicity between Hispanics and Whites. Hispanics represented 82.31% of the student population that was tested in 2001-2002 and 83.70% in 2002-2003. White students represented 16.74% of the population that tested in 2001-2002 and 15.30% in 2002-2003. The key figures in the first series of numbers are those showing the passing and failing rates for Hispanic and White students.

For the 2001-2002 school year, passing percentages are 62.50% for Hispanics

and 87.36% for Whites. This represents a difference of 24.86% between the two groups. For the 2002-2003 school year the percentages are 75.4% for Hispanics and 90.6% for Whites. For the 2002-2003 school year the difference between the two groups is 15.2%. In the first series the total number of students that failed in the 2001-2002 school year was 735. Of this number 686 were Hispanic and 47 were White. These numbers represent a failure rate of 30.87% for Hispanics and 2.11% for Whites. For the 2002-2003 school year the failure rate for Hispanics is 20.61% while that of Whites is 1.43%. In both years the passing rates and failure rates show improvements. However, the disparities still remain high between the two groups with the greater difference found in the failure rates for the two groups.

The same type of analysis can be extracted from the Mathematics test results. Note that in the 2001-2002 school year the passing rate for Hispanics and Whites was 58.50% and 81.26% respectively. The difference was 22.76%. In the 2002-2003 school year the passing rates were 70.50% and 90.10% for a difference of 19.6%. Failure rate differences were much greater. In the 2001-2002 school year the differences were 34.02% and 3.18% resulting in a difference of 30.84%.

For the 2002-2003 school year the failure rates were 24.74% and 1.49% for a difference of 23.25%. As with the reading/language arts tests, there is improvement in the

mathematics tests between the 2001-2002 and 2002-2003 school years. However, the disparity in both passing and failure rates between the two groups remains excessively high.

The last series of numbers represent the graduation rates for 2001 and 2002. In both years it can be seen that the total number of seniors is higher than the actual graduates. The difference comes about because of the failure on the part of students to pass the TAAS/TAKS test and thus fail to graduate. Note that the graduation rates for Hispanics is lower than for Whites and that the disparity between non-graduating Hispanics and Whites is high in both school years (the difference is 19.5% in 2001 and 23.6% in 2002 thus increasing by 4.1%).

Other figures that can be extracted are the longitudinal dropout rates. This is obtained by accessing the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) report for the district. By looking at the number of 7th graders in the 1995-1996 school year, this will give the number of students that should be graduating five years later in 2001. The same can be done for the 1996-1997 school year to ascertain how many students should graduate in 2002.

Based on the 1995-1996 AEIS report, there were 404 students in the 7th grade. This means that there should have been 404 students graduating in 2001. Subtracting 318 students (the number that were seniors in 2001) from the 404 means that 86 students dropped out prior to their senior year. This means that the dropout for this class was 21.2%. However, subtracting 2 students (actual graduate) means that 168 out of 404 did not graduate. It is well documented that students who fail to graduate due to not passing the TAAS/TAKS become discouraged. A large percent of these students never go back to retake the TASS/TAKS test even though it is offered. Taking this into consideration, 168 students who do not graduate represents 41.5% of the original 404 students in 7th grade.

The same information can be obtained for the graduating class of 2002. In 1995-1997, the total number of graders was 406. Five years later in 2002 there are 3 seniors. This means that students were lost between 7th and 12th grade for a drop out rate of 16.50%. Adding the non-graduating seniors brings the 67 students to 146 for an eventual drop rate of 35.96%.

What does all the above information really mean? It points to what has been stated time and time again by *La Voz* – the district has failed for the past 33 years to address the issue of unequal achievement first brought up in the 1970 discrimination lawsuit. And why has the district failed? Two reasons: (1) administrative indifference based on the desires of the local oligarchy to ensure success for the children without regard for the failure of others, and (2) failure on the part of parents to demand change and a

(Please See Page 4)

Page # 4

LA VOZ DE UVALDE COUNTY - September 27, 2003

"Brown" Girls...

(cont. from pg. 1)

with the summer club volleyball. According to at least two parents, coach Lindsey told them that participation of girls in volleyball depended on their attending a volleyball camp. The coach sent a letter to the parents informing them of a club volleyball for the girls. The cost of the camp ranged from \$500 to \$2,000 depending on the extent of the training. When concerns were raised as to the cost, coach Lindsey indicated that fund raising was a means of obtaining the money. According to parents she also indicated that she would be in contact with the parents to discuss possible fund raising activities. One of the parents stated that she called the coach twice and left messages to ask about the fund raising. The coach never returned her calls and the parent decided not to call anymore, as it appeared that the coach was ignoring her.

For Hispanic girls and their parents, the issue of the volleyball camp became moot early this year. According to parents, at that time coach Lindsey shared with at least two parents which players she had selected for positions on the volleyball team. Her earlier statement that playing on the team depended on attending the volleyball camp was therefore meaningless, as the decision with regards as to who would play had

been made. A prelude to this decision came at meeting the coach had with parents. According to one parent, at that meeting coach Lindsey stated flatly stated to her, "Your daughter isn't starter material." This, without any question having been raised by the mother who thought that the meeting would be about how to encourage the girls in order to get better performance out of them.

Another issue that irritated not only the girls and the parents, but many members of the Hispanic community, is the coach's repeated use of the term "brown," in reference to Hispanic players. According to a student, in one incident last year in preparation for parent's night, the coach had requested volunteers from the team to talk to the parents. Two white girls raised their hands and the coach said she needed more volunteers. When two more white girls raised their hands the coach said, "I need some *brown* girls also." When this year's volleyball season began it was noted that there were no Hispanic girls on either the varsity or junior varsity teams. A meeting was held between some Hispanic parents and UHS Athletic Director Juan Hinojosa where issues were raised (including those raised in this article), and questioned the lack of Hispanic

participation. It was later learned that Coach Lindsey, apparently upset, stated that parents had questioned the fact, "That I don't have any *brown* girls, or Mexican girls on the team."

According to parents, in order to explain away the fact that no Hispanic girls were on either the varsity or junior varsity volleyball teams, Coach Lindsey had stated that she had "high expectations." Somehow, Hispanic girls apparently did meet those expectations. Also, according to parents, another excuse used to explain why no Hispanic girls were participating on the volleyball team dealt with "senior-itus." In other words, the girls now being seniors had decided to do as little as possible in their senior year. However, it is interesting to note that these same Hispanic girls continue to participate in other sports. And what about the juniors? Did they get "junior-itus?" Did the sophomores get "sophomore-itus?" How is it that only Hispanic girls did not meet expectations; that only Hispanic girls opted not to participate in volleyball? What was it that affected these girls? Was it perhaps a case of "volleyball-itus."

A number of the parents *La Voz* spoke with stated that their daughters felt bad because of a "lack of participation." Several also stated that the coach had been "unfair." One parent stated that she was "very disappointed;" that the whole issue was "very emotional," and that it was very "unfair." A number of parents also stated that some of the girls were very good players and that they had been playing together since seventh grade. *Very telling*

is that fact that none of the Hispanic girls that played volleyball at the high school level last year returned this year. One parent adamantly questioned Coach Lindsey's "program" since it was exclusive and had little to no depth where backup players was concerned.

At least one parent stated that Coach Lindsey is a very dedicated, tough and demanding coach. Parents stated they have no problems with this. What is at issue with some parents is that the coach seems not to care that these girls did not return. They claim there has been no effort on her part to encourage the return of these girls even though there is the need for depth, especially in the varsity team. The fact that there are no Hispanic girls on the volleyball team has even been notice by coaches and persons in other communities.

In a telephone conversation with coach Lindsey, *La Voz* addressed the issues included above. She stated that she was "aware that the varsity and junior do not represent the makeup of the community." That "it looks bad, looks terrible that the teams do not represent the community." As to the concerns of unfairness and non-playing of certain athletes, Coach Lindsey stated that she played the "kids that were more skilled." As to the harsh treatment of the athletes, Lindsey stated that when she took over as varsity coach she told parents that all the volleyball players "played poorly" and needed extensive practice in order to be competitive. In order to bring the players up to the point that they could be competitive, Coach Lindsey thus began a rigorous and

demanding training program. Part of the program, according to the coach, involved the issue of weight loss. Coach Lindsey said she did not recall having embarrassed any one particular girl, although she did say that she spoke to some girls individually as to weight loss. The purpose of the weight loss, according to the coach, was to obtain greater flexibility and a better playing ability. Essentially, according to Coach Lindsey, the "weight prohibited them from being better players."

When asked about the club volleyball, the high expense and the fundraising, Lindsey stated that the purpose of the club volleyball was to get the players to "have greater contact with the ball" and thus hone their skills. She stated that she was aware that cost was an issue with some parents and that she had stated that fund raising by individual players (from elementary level to secondary level) was a matter that had to be addressed by the individual players. She stated that UIL rules did not allow her to become directly involved with fund raising and that she had so stated to the parents. She also stated that the \$500 required for the amount of participation agreed upon could be paid in increments with \$75 due by a certain day. Additionally, she also stated that she had written five grants in an attempt to obtain moneys to cover the costs. Of the five, she obtained \$300 from one grant and that money was used to purchase volleyballs and equipment — something that "everybody uses."

When asked directly why not a single Hispanic female volleyball player from last year had returned this year, coach Lindsey stated that she felt that the athletes were "being selective" and were "concentrating on fewer sports" in order to hone their skills; that the athletes had decided to "focus on fall or spring sports." She stated that she was aware that many of the athletes were participating in other sports where perhaps they felt that they could contribute more. She also stated that she was concerned with the lack of depth on the teams and that she was attempting to address this by possibly moving up some of the girls. And, she stated that she "did

who would be playing, her typical reply was "If we were playing today, these would be the players;" and that the players would be those who at the moment were best qualified and skilled.

With regards to the use of the phrase "brown girls," Coach Lindsey admitted using the phrase. However, in using the term she stated that it was never used in a disparaging manner. It was used as a means to identify or call attention to the girls (both "brown girls" and "white girls") when getting them onto the court for practice. The use of the phrase, according to the coach, came about as she became more comfortable with the players and that she never used it "in a negative connotation." Furthermore, she stated that no-one complained, and that if anyone had come to her and stated that they were not in agreement with its usage that she would have stopped using the term. It was pointed out to the coach that in conversation with *La Voz* she had also used the term "Mexican kids." But, as she pointed out, this was for identification purposes to explain her perspective and not used in a negative manner. Coach Lindsey than stated, "I am not at all prejudiced with the exception that I am prejudiced against people that are lazy and not committed to whatever endeavor they may pursue."

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(Please See Page 10)